

Summary of the Strategic Plan for the Restoration of Atlantic Salmon to the Connecticut River Basin

The Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Restoration Program has provided many public benefits over the last thirty years. These include the return of the Atlantic salmon after two centuries of extinction, increased opportunities for: seeing migrating fish, learning about the fish, biology and program, and visiting hatcheries; increased habitat for other species; increased understanding through research that has benefitted other species and programs; increased value for the river and adjacent lands and wildlife; and, improved aesthetics in places where indicator species like salmon can survive and thrive.

The *Strategic Plan for the Restoration of Atlantic Salmon to the Connecticut River* has been revised to ensure that these and other public benefits are continued into the future. The draft Plan, when it is finalized after public comment, will be used to help focus efforts and agency commitment to the restoration program. The process of restoring Atlantic salmon and managing basin resources is a collective responsibility that must be shared by the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission, member agencies, industry, dam owners and the public.

This draft Strategic Plan provides background on the Commission, the basin, salmon, and the program. It further sets forth six primary goals for the Commission to accomplish its mission to protect, conserve, restore, and enhance the Atlantic salmon population in the Connecticut River for public benefit, including recreational fishing:

1. Manage Atlantic salmon production to produce sea-run Atlantic salmon returns.

Cooperating agencies will produce enough Atlantic salmon eggs, fry and smolts to stock all available habitat in the four basin states. Facility capacity and staff capabilities will be expanded to maximize production of quality release stocks.

2. Enhance and maintain the quantity, quality and accessibility of salmon habitat necessary to support re-established spawning populations.

State and federal regulatory authorities will be used to protect and restore existing or potential Atlantic salmon habitat in 38 tributaries, provide fish passage, and minimize migratory delays or losses resulting from river obstructions or degradation.

3. Protect Connecticut River Atlantic salmon from exploitation.

The Commission will continue to support scientific management of sea-run Atlantic salmon populations, minimizing harvest, and working with regulators, to maximize annual returns to the Connecticut River.

4. Allocate adult sea-run salmon to maximize benefits to the program.

Sea-run salmon will be used to support hatchery production, natural spawning in basin streams, instream smolt production, research, education, and recreation.

5. Assess program effectiveness by conducting monitoring, evaluation, and research, and by implementing appropriate changes.

The program will be assessed periodically to determine if objectives are being accomplished and to make improvements where accomplishments have been limited or less successful.

6. Provide the public with information and opportunities to be involved in the restoration program.

Public awareness of the program will be encouraged to actively involve the public in restoration activities, develop public alliances, and encourage volunteerism.

The Commission is optimistic about what the restoration program can accomplish in the future. The twenty-first century should bring an increase in the number of returning salmon, increased natural in-stream smolt production, and improved downstream fish passage.